

Intensive Learning Workshop: Keyboards

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Modern Musical Context

“WHAT DO I DO WITH MY LEFT HAND?”

Prepared for



2009

INTENSIVE LEARNING WORKSHOP

HOW TO MAKE EFFECTIVE USE OF BOTH HANDS

One of the questions I hear most from keyboard players is, "What do I do with my left hand?"

Good question. The issue, primarily in the band setting, is interference with the bass and guitars. This interference happens at...

1. A harmonic level
2. A rhythmic level

In this session we are going to look at a number of ways to make good use of both hands. This will allow you to be as economical and effective with your notes, rhythms and voicings as possible.

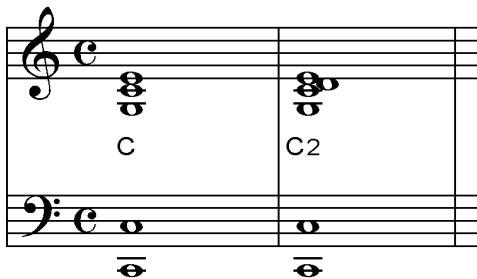
We will break the workshop down as follows:

- Part 1. Constructing New Two-Hand Chord Voicings
- Part 2. Left Hand Comping With Right Hand Melodic Ideas
- Part 3. Keyboard Splitting – Playing Two Separate Sounds

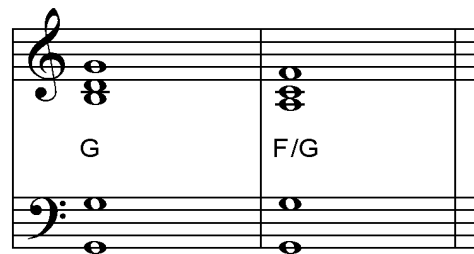
Part 1. Constructing New Two-Hand Chord Voicings

Let's say you see a C chord on your chart.

You might play something like this:



If it was a G or F/G, perhaps something like this:



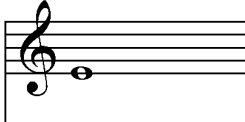


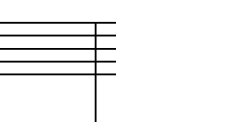
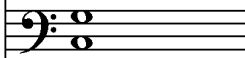
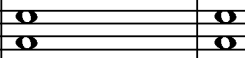
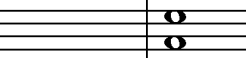

- How efficient was that?
- Of the five notes in the first example, how many of them are roots? (C's)
- What does that do to the weighting?
- Does the low 'C' get in a bass player's way?
- Even in the second example, a lot of doubling or tripling of roots – and still too low in the bass.
- Are these voicings too 'thick'? Maybe not for solo playing...but you are in a band and you must share the harmonic blanket.

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How Do You Fix It?

When a chord has too much of one tone in it, an unbalanced sound is created. It is like alliteration in speech or prose – *scientists say saying something simple seldom settles situations*. Too much of the 's' sound? While you may want this for effect from time to time, normally you will want to achieve a more balanced and pleasing sound.

Let's consider two-hand voicings for a possible solution.

1.	2.	3.	4.
			
C	C2	C Maj7	C Maj9
			

(Refer to the example on the previous page when needed)

- **In Bar 1 (above)** we have removed unnecessary notes to 'thin' the sound. We briefly looked at open voicings in the following sections. To create an open voice triad you simply take the middle note out of the triad and move it up one octave, or down. With bigger chords, this is called a drop 2 voicing – taking the '2nd' note from the top of a four-note chord and moving it down an octave – very popular in jazz.
 - Using an open voicing in a pad or string patch can create a very rich sound.
- **In Bar 2** we kept the 'E' but avoided the temptation of throwing the C back in for comfort sake. Instead we added a colour note – D – and doubled the fifth. Because the fifth was not the root, it feels ok to double it, as it helps create interest and balance against the 2nd.
- **In Bar 3** we have a four-note chord but still no doubling. This is a nice Maj7 chord voicing and can be used to add some colour to the I or the IV chord when the melody is not the root of that chord. A root note sung against a major 7 creates a half step collision for the person singing in that range.
 - Play example 3 while singing middle 'C.'
- **In Bar 4** we simply added more colour – the 2nd – to example 3. Now we have a Cmaj9 chord.

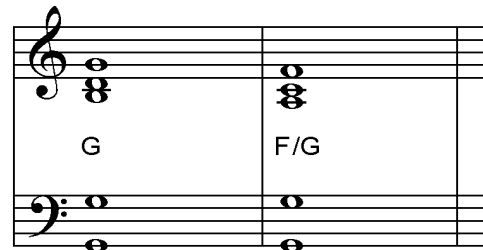
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Clarifying Questions:

- Why do we call it a Maj9 (major 9) chord and not a major 2 chord?
 - The major 7th interval is ALWAYS a _____ step below the root of the chord.
 - How do you turn a triad into 'open' position?
-

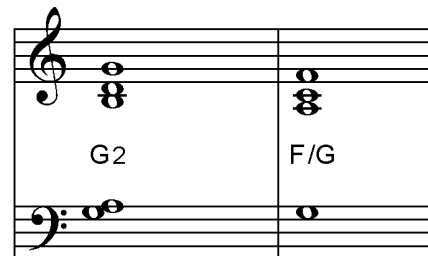
Lets do the same thing with the G or F/G chord.

Again, too much root in the first example and both examples probably go too low for band playing.



In the first bar we took out the low 'G' and added the 2nd below the B. More of a cluster chord, but it has a nice warm sound and is not too low.

In the second bar (F/G) we just removed the bass note, making room for the bass player.



Chord Fractions (Polychords)

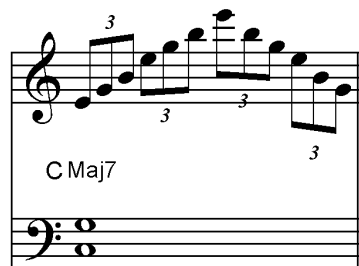
A fast way to obtain nice rich voicings is to use chord fractions. We have talked about chord fractions on and off but lets look at some practical chord fractions that you can use in your playing right away. First, a chord fraction is just like a math fraction – something over something equals something else. So, we could say a triad played in the right hand over a one or two-note voicing in the left is a *chord fraction*.

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Top 5 Chord Fractions

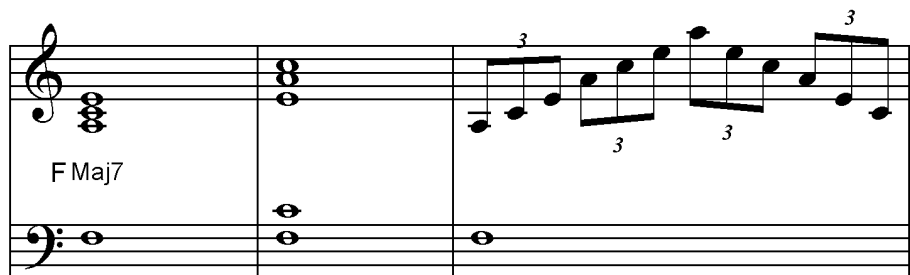
There are many chord fractions available to you. For our purposes I will mention only five. Learn them in all 12 keys and you will have 60 great chords that you can access quite readily.

Chord fractions also make it very easy to do runs, fills and licks because you are only dealing with a triad.



1. **The Maj7 Chord.** The major seventh chord is obtained by playing **a minor triad built a third above the root** note of the chord (not the scale.) So to create an Fmaj7 play an 'F' in your left hand and an Am triad in your right. The Am is built on the third of the chord.

- **MATH:** $\text{III m}\Delta / \text{R (root)} = \text{Maj7 chord}$



- Try playing the arpeggios this way.

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2. **The Min7 Chord.** The minor seventh chord is almost the same fraction as the Maj7 – just reverse the rule. **Play a major triad a minor third above the root.** So to create a Gm7 chord, play a 'G' in your left hand and a Bb triad in your right. Add the fifth, the 'D' (bar 2) in your left hand and play the Bb triad in second inversion for a different sound.

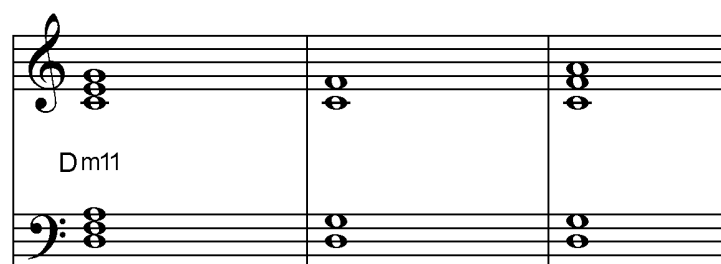
- **MATH:** bIIIΔ / R = Min7 chord



3. **The Min 11th Chord.** The minor eleventh chord (a more colourful option to the minor seventh chord) is built simply by **playing a minor triad in your left hand and a major triad on the minor seventh note of the chord.** These are called *stacked thirds*. Getting a Dm11 chord is easy – its just a C triad over a D minor triad.

- **MATH:** bVIIΔ / ImΔ = min 11th chord
- I prefer an alternate route to get to this chord. (bar 2) Lets use 4ths to do this.
Just find the root note and stack 4ths up from there until you have 4 notes. Then to make it a little richer, just add a major third above the last 4th. (bar3) This would make Dmin11th look like this: (bar 3)

LH: D G RH: C F A (bar 3)



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4. **The Min7b5 Chord.** The minor seven flat five (or half diminished chord) has a wonderful jazzy type of sound to it. It is played in much the same manner as the Min 7 chord. **Play a minor triad a minor third above the root.** Lets try a tough Min7b5 chord to de-mystify these chords. F#m7b5 is created by playing an 'F#' in your left hand and an A minor triad in your right. Notice how easy it is to play an A minor arpeggio instead of a full F#m7b5 arpeggio. The sound is not compromised because you have already played the root – it is still an F#m7b5 chord. You can also play the root and flat 5 (bar 2) in your left hand followed by an inverted Am chord in your right.

- **MATH:** bIIIm Δ / R = Min7b5 chord

Musical notation for the F#m7(b5) chord and arpeggio. The notation is in treble and bass clefs. The first measure shows the F#m7(b5) chord in the bass clef (F#2, A2, C#3, E3, G#3, Bb3) and the F#m7(b5) arpeggio in the treble clef (F#3, A3, C#4, E4, G#4, Bb4). The second measure shows the F#m7(b5) chord in the bass clef and the F#m7(b5) arpeggio in the treble clef. The third measure shows the F#m7(b5) chord in the bass clef and the F#m7(b5) arpeggio in the treble clef.

5. **The 11th Chord.** The eleven chord is built simply by **playing the root in your left hand and a major triad a minor seventh above the root.** C11 would be created by playing a 'C' in your left hand and a Bb triad in your right. This is a great transition chord to new keys. You can even add the 5th in the left hand if you like. (bar 2) ***Note:** the low C could cause bass conflict if you add rhythm.

- **MATH:** bVII Δ / R = 11 chord

Musical notation for the C11 chord and arpeggio. The notation is in treble and bass clefs. The first measure shows the C11 chord in the bass clef (C2, E2, G2, Bb2, D3, F3) and the C11 arpeggio in the treble clef (C3, E3, G3, Bb3, D4, F4). The second measure shows the C11 chord in the bass clef and the C11 arpeggio in the treble clef. The third measure shows the C11 chord in the bass clef and the C11 arpeggio in the treble clef.

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6. **The 13b9 Chord.** Ok, so this is more than 5 chords...but you will love this one. Every jazz piano player uses this voicing. It's a bit trickier, but the sound you get is wonderful. It's a dominant 7th type of chord so the left hand is a little different. To get a 13 flat 9 chord **play the 3rd and 7th of the dominant chord in your left hand and play a major triad built on the 6th of that chord.** So for a G13b9 play an F and B in your left hand and an E major triad in your right. Now go find a jazz club and show your stuff!!

- **MATH:** VI Δ / bVII + III = 13b9 chord.

The image shows musical notation for the G13(b9) chord and its arpeggio. It consists of three measures. The first two measures show the chord voicing in G major (one sharp) with a treble clef and a bass clef. The treble clef has a G4 and a B4, and the bass clef has an F3 and a B2. The third measure shows the arpeggio of the G13(b9) chord, with a treble clef and a bass clef. The treble clef has a G4, A4, B4, C5, D5, E5, F5, and G5, and the bass clef has an F3, G3, A3, B3, C4, D4, E4, and F4. The arpeggio is marked with a '3' above the first three notes and a '3' below the last three notes.

You now have a number of ways to create two-hand voicings. This will give you something more interesting to play now that you have thinned out the bass register. It also gives you options other than doubling or tripling the root note while allowing you to play triadic arpeggios and fills with greater ease.

Our next section will cover left hand voicings. **The goal** – assigning of different roles in both hands.

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Part 2: Left Hand Comping With Right Hand Melodic Ideas

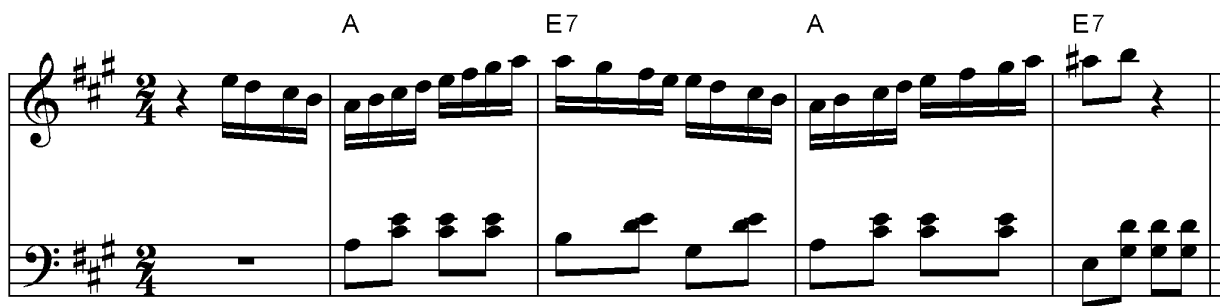
Triads and Exercises

While the chords in the previous example are very pretty, without the ability to play basic triads and intervals in the left hand, the overall sound you are trying to achieve will be compromised. In this section we will look at the basics of simple left hand accompaniment. If Mozart saw the value in it, then we must also.

The Mozart Example: *Independent and Supportive Left Hand*

In this familiar excerpt from *Rondo alla Turca* notice how simple the left hand is.

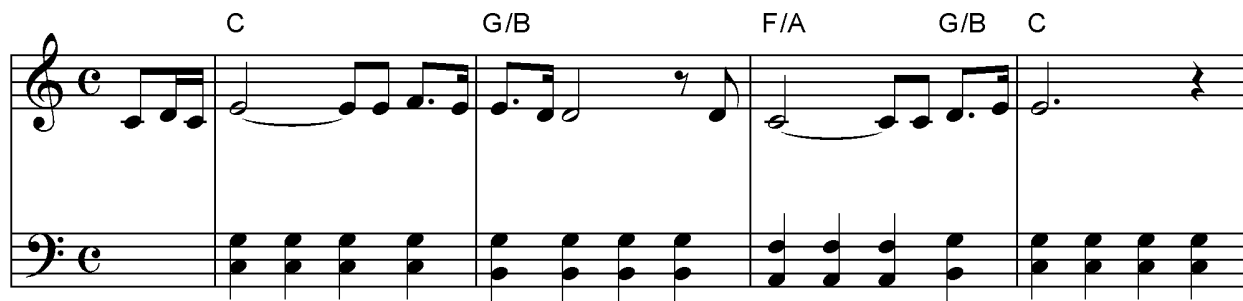
Notice also how independent YET supportive it is.



- Now trying playing this example using solid chords in the left hand only. It's just I and V7.

The Rose: *An Example of Open Voice Triads.*

In this illustration notice how both hands work to attain an 'open' voice sound in the piece. The middle note is taken out of the left hand triad. Often, taking out the melody note from the left hand gives the overall sound more clarity.



- **Question:** When you are playing left hand chords on the piano or keyboard, do you always need to play EVERY note in the chord? How about just part of the chord? Is it a cleaner sound?

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A Hymn/Pop Example

In this example notice how the melody note is avoided in the left hand. This allows the melody to stand out on its own while making sure the left hand harmony does not get too thick and cluttered.

C G7/D C/E F Dm7 G7/B C C/E F/AF Maj7 G11

The Three Primary Chords You Must Know in All 12 Keys

My Guarantee

1. If you know how to play the I, IV and V chord in all keys in all inversions...
2. ...and if you can hum a melody you hear in your head, you will be able to play almost anything.

The 3 Primary Chords

Because the I, IV and V chords cover ALL of the notes in the major scale, it stands to reason that any melody derived from the major scale must be able to be harmonized using these chords. Quite simply, play the chord that has the melody note in it. Only play the chords on the beat – passing notes in the melody don't need to have a chord under them at all times. With this concept learned, you will feel more confident playing songs for people "off the cuff," separating your hands to allow you to do fills and harmony not just bass and chords and it will allow you a canvas on which you can create your own music – the songs in your head.

Full Triad Thinner

C G C F C C G C F C

I, IV, V (Root position Start)

I, IV, V (1st Inversion Start)

I, IV, V (2nd Inversion Start) (Can you do this inversion without looking?)

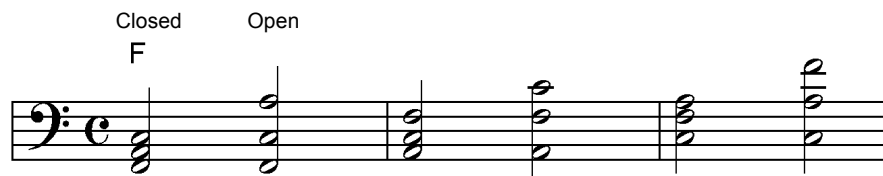
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Three Ways to Make Chords More Interesting

1. Open them Up
2. Roll them Up
3. Colour them Up

Open Them Up

Closed triads become open triads to avoid clutter and muddiness.

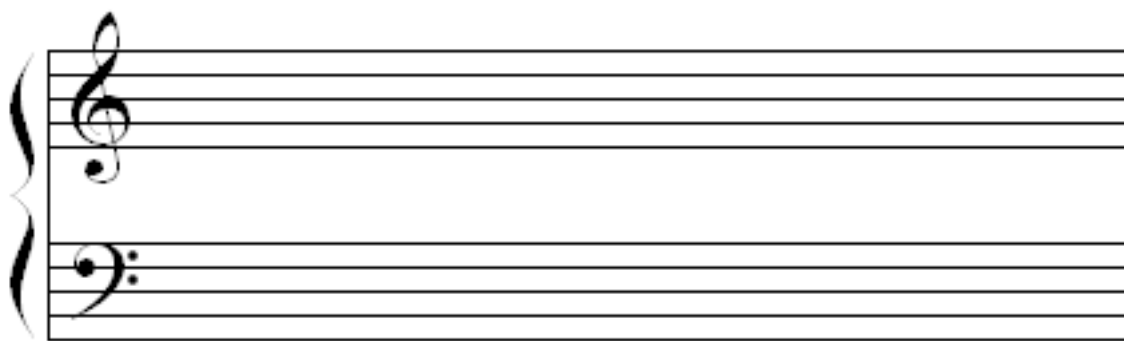


How are they created? (we touched on this earlier)

Lets try this progression. Draw in barlines to create a 4 – bar system.

- First, play this progression with root voicing's in your left hand.
- Now, take out the middle note from each chord and move it up one octave. Play it.

Em - Bm - C - D

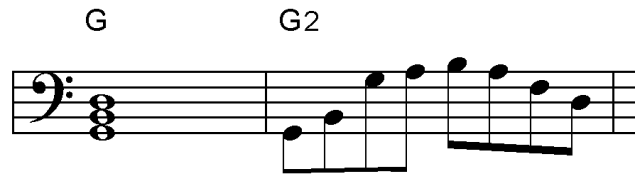


What do you notice? What do you hear?

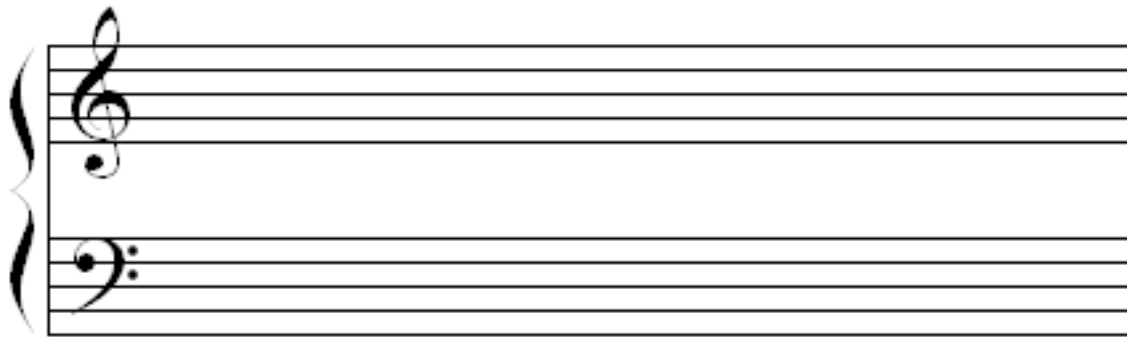
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Roll Them Up

- Rolling up the triad from bottom to top creates interest and movement. We added the 'A', or 2nd too allow the pattern to flow a little easier.

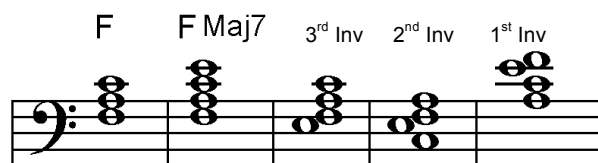
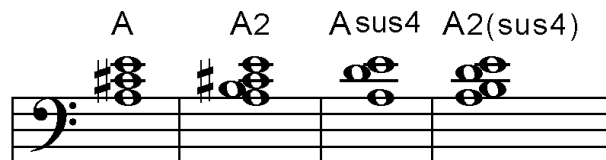


In this example, the B in the 2nd measure makes it a little muddy and also makes the hand position awkward because of the leap. Improve it:



Colour Them Up

- Bar 2, we added the 2
- Bar 3, we sus'd it
- Bar 4, we did both.
 - You can also add the Major 7th to the chord, making it one-handed voicing. This is great for pop and jazz when doing fills.
 - Use inversions for good voice leading and reducing muddiness. Find where these chords sound the best.



DON'T FORGET TO LEARN THESE CONCEPTS IN ALL KEYS

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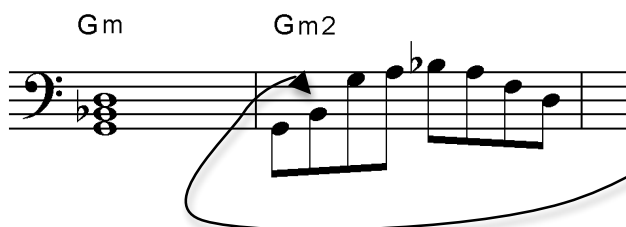
What About Minor Voicings?

Minor chords in the left hand operate in the same fashion. We saw this in the example on the previous page.

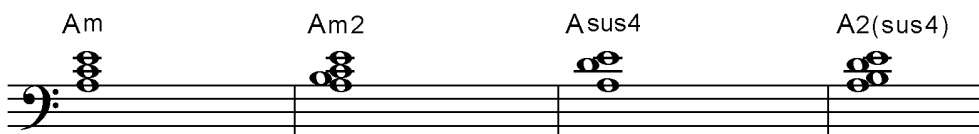
- **Open them up** the same way you would a major triad.



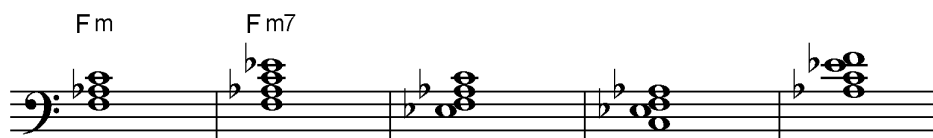
4. **Roll them up**, but make sure to make the third minor or flat. Again, that low 3rd could become a 5th.



- **Colour them up** by adding the 2 and the 4



- Make them a 4-note minor seven chord. (Can you still see the chord fraction even though its all in one hand now?)



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Progressions With Left Hand Voicings

Let's play a few progressions in with left hand voicings using all of the elements we have learned.

- Open and closed voicings
- Rolling up the chord
- Colouring up the chord

We will use a progression similar to the one Paul Baloche used in the song "My Offering."

Use ideas such as pentatonic scales and motifs, write in some ideas in the treble clef.

Chord progression in F major (4/4 time):

Measure	Chord(s)
1	F
2	C/E
3	B \flat 2/D
4	F/C
5	F/A
6	B \flat
7	F2/C
8	C7sus4

Chord progression in F major (4/4 time) with treble clef motif:

Measure	Chord(s)	Treble Clef
1	F	F, A, C, E, G
2	C/E	F, A, C, E, G
3	B \flat 2/D	F, A, C, E, G
4	F/C	F, A, C, E, G
5	F/A	
6	B \flat	
7	F2/C	
8	F2/C	

Chord progression in F major (4/4 time):

Measure	Chord(s)
1	F Maj7
2	C
3	B \flat 2
4	F2
5	F
6	B \flat 2
7	C7sus4

Application: Next time you are on worship team begin to play chords (with all the options you have learned) while doing sparse fills and motifs in the right hand.

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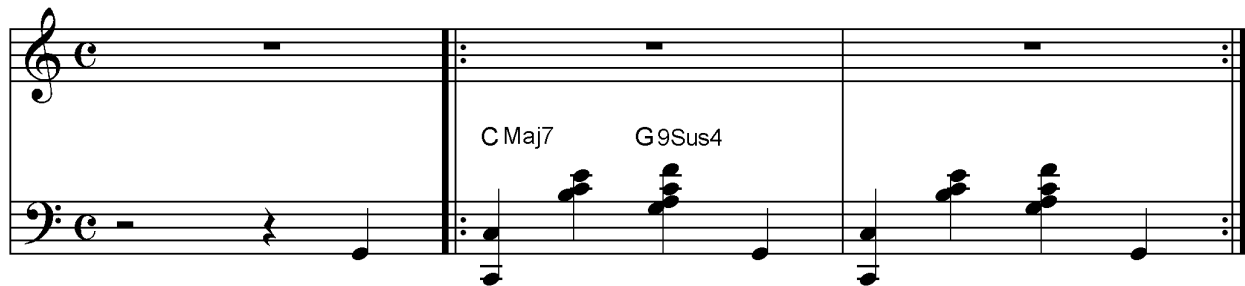
A Little Jazzier

***Example Based on 'Peace Piece' by Bill Evans**

This simple repetitive left hand ostinato is a great way to develop your left hand voicings.. The key of C makes this a very enjoyable and accessible process. This exercise is best used with an excellent **YouTube** video from Australian pianist, Doug McKenzie. If you do a You Tube search –“Doug Mackenzie Peace Piece” you should find it.

What to Do?

1) Learn the left hand until it is steady and starts feeling natural



2) Learn a few phrases from the video by ear.

3) Using 'C pentatonic' and 'G pentatonic' make up some melodies using interesting skips and jumps in the melody. (*Use the score on the following page for ideas.)



What Have You Learned?

- More confidence in the left hand?
- New chords and 'voicings.' (Cmaj7 and G9sus4)
- Some new ideas by ear.
- Making melodies using pentatonic scales.

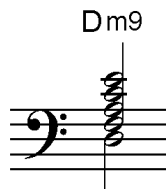
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A Little More?

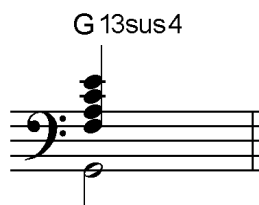
Ok, if we take the idea of chord fractions and consider that a 7th chord over a root will also yield some nice voicings a new sound appears. Min9ths and 13ths.

Learn these rules:

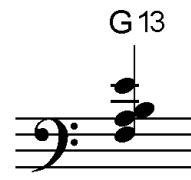
- To create a minor 9th chord just **play a Maj7 chord a minor 3rd above the root.**
 - So, Dm9 will equal an Fmaj7 over D.



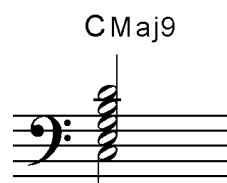
- To create a 13th chord, (the one that naturally follows a minor 9th), you need only play a Maj7 on the 7th note of the chord. So, what's the seventh of G? F. Ok, now **play an F Maj7 Chord over G.** Sounds nice eh? In fact, you are playing a G13 Sus 4.



Simply DROP THE FIFTH A HALF STEP and now you have full-fledged G13 chord.



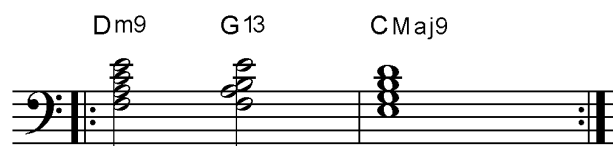
- Why do we call it a 13?
- Finally, you are going to end up at some sort of C chord when this progression is over. Lets make it a Cmaj9. Just play an Em7 over C. In other words, a Min7 chord played on the third will yield a Maj9 chord.



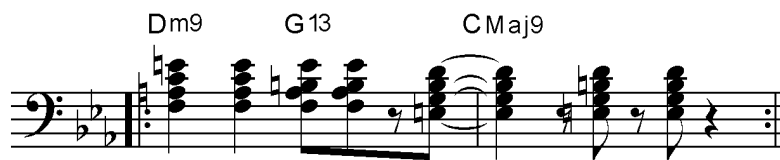
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Now Try it Root-less

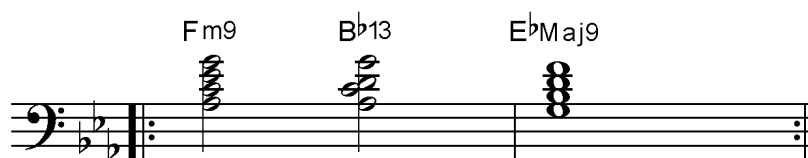
As long as you have a bass player playing the roots, you will be fine just playing the left hand voicings without a bass note. This is called a II – V – I progression. Very common in jazz and pop and a lot of fun to solo over with a pentatonic scale.



Play it again and add some rhythm.



Don't just stick to C. Try it in Eb.



Keep practicing and add some interesting colour notes in the right hand. Try Eb or Bb pentatonic and see what you get.

DON'T FORGET TO LEARN THESE CONCEPTS IN ALL KEYS

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Part 3. Keyboard Splitting = Brain Splitting. Playing Two Separate Sounds

So by now you should have learned that there are lots of things to do with your left hand other than playing the bass notes.

Another way to occupy both hands in an efficient manner is to **split your keyboard**. You will have to figure out how your particular keyboard splits by checking with your user manual. Or Google “how to split a RD-700.” (or whatever your keyboard is.) You can also use two keyboards to achieve this.

We are going to use the same concepts we learned in the first two sections and apply it to a split keyboard. Here are some split options:

LEFT HAND	RIGHT HAND
Pad	Strings
Pad	Ac. Piano
Pad	Rhodes
Pad	Organ
Pad	Nylon String Guitar
Rhodes	Organ
Rhodes	Strings
Rhodes	Ac Piano
Ac. Piano	Rhodes
Ac. Piano	Strings
Ac. Piano	Organ

The key is to make sure the sounds are distinct enough to be noticed well. This will also help you hear the difference clearly in a stage setting. Lets look at one example for each of the above combinations.

We will use basic rhythms in the left hand for the purpose of this study. Feel free to thin out the chords more after you have played through the examples a few times. Refer back to section in your workshop manual that discuss playing strings and fills etc.

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Left and Right Hand Techniques

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Keyboard Split Combinations: What to Do in Each Hand?

Pad and Strings (chord tones)

Musical notation for Pad and Strings (chord tones). The notation is in B-flat major (two flats). The right hand plays a descending eighth-note melody. The left hand plays block chords. Chord labels above the left hand are: B \flat , E \flat , F sus4, and B \flat .

Pad and Acoustic Piano (a motif that descends through the key)

Musical notation for Pad and Acoustic Piano (a motif that descends through the key). The notation is in G major (one sharp). The right hand plays a descending eighth-note melody. The left hand plays block chords. Chord labels above the left hand are: G, Bm, C2, and Dsus. A slur connects the Bm and C2 chords, and another slur connects the C2 and Dsus chords.

Pad and Rhodes (a little more funky feel)

Musical notation for Pad and Rhodes (a little more funky feel). The notation is in F minor (three flats). The right hand plays a descending eighth-note melody. The left hand plays block chords. Chord labels above the left hand are: Fm2, D \flat 9 C7 \sharp 9, Fm2, and D \flat 9 C7 \sharp 9.

Pad and Organ (a bit of a jazz flavour, ballad feel)

Musical notation for Pad and Organ (a bit of a jazz flavour, ballad feel). The notation is in C major (no sharps or flats). The right hand plays a descending eighth-note melody. The left hand plays block chords. Chord labels above the left hand are: C Maj7, Gm7/C, F Maj7, and B \flat 7.

INTENSIVE LEARNING WORKSHOP

Left and Right Hand Techniques

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Pad and Nylon String Guitar (this is ethereal sounding, nice for intros, endings and vamps)

Four-measure musical exercise for Pad and Nylon String Guitar. The key signature is one sharp (F#), and the time signature is 7/8. The melody is written in the treble clef, and the accompaniment is in the bass clef. The chords are Em, C, G, and D.

Rhodes and Organ (a minor blues type of feel)

Four-measure musical exercise for Rhodes and Organ. The key signature is two flats (Bb, Eb), and the time signature is 4/4. The melody is written in the treble clef, and the accompaniment is in the bass clef. The chords are Gm2, Cm7, Gm2, and D7#9.

Rhodes and Strings (pop sounding, using chord tones)

Four-measure musical exercise for Rhodes and Strings. The key signature is three flats (Bb, Eb, Ab), and the time signature is 4/4. The melody is written in the treble clef, and the accompaniment is in the bass clef. The chords are Ab, Db/F, Ab/C, and DbMaj7 Eb/sus.

Rhodes and Acoustic Piano (a piano ostinato approach)

Four-measure musical exercise for Rhodes and Acoustic Piano. The key signature is one sharp (F#), and the time signature is 4/4. The melody is written in the treble clef, and the accompaniment is in the bass clef. The chords are G, D, Em, and C2.

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Acoustic Piano and Rhodes (ostinato in left while playing simple intervals in right)

Musical notation for Acoustic Piano and Rhodes. The piece is in B-flat major (two flats). The left hand plays a continuous eighth-note ostinato pattern. The right hand plays simple intervals. Chords indicated below the staff are: Bb, F, Bb2/D, Eb6, and Fsus.

Acoustic Piano and Strings (strings filling the back of some measures, not very busy)

Musical notation for Acoustic Piano and Strings. The piece is in F# major (three sharps). The left hand plays chords. The right hand plays simple intervals. Chords indicated below the staff are: F#m2, D, A, and Esus2.

Acoustic Piano and Organ (a blues rock organ lick over a blues piano vamp)

Musical notation for Acoustic Piano and Organ. The piece is in B-flat major (two flats). The left hand plays a blues piano vamp with chords. The right hand plays a blues rock organ lick with eighth notes.

▪ **Tips:**

- Think as part of the band – what is your role in the moment?
- Create motifs
- Leave space
- Watch phrasing
- Share ideas, double lines with other players
- Avoid clutter

DON'T FORGET TO LEARN THESE CONCEPTS IN ALL KEYS

INTENSIVE LEARNING WORKSHOP

Left and Right Hand Techniques

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Notes and Ideas from Today's Session